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SUBJECT: DISENGAGEMENT SITUATION REPORT, AUGUST 24, 2005
(AS OF 1600 LOCAL TIME)

This is a joint message from Consulate General Jerusalem and Embassy Tel Aviv.

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: As of 1800 local time August 23, all settlers were evacuated from Sa Nur and Homesh settlements, completing evacuation of all residents and protesters from the Gaza Strip and four northern West Bank settlements. Israeli forces told Israeli press that they were prepared for heavy resistance, but that the evacuations were faster and easier than expected. A total of 42 Israeli police, soldiers and residents/protesters were lightly injured in the course of the Sa Nur and Homesh evacuations. In the Gaza Strip, the situation remained generally calm and quiet, with all settlements evacuated as of August 22. One mortar was fired at the Gush Katif block August 23 (currently in the process of being dismantled and demolished), but no injuries or damage resulted. End Summary.

2. (SBU) SETTLER EVACUATION STATUS:

Gaza Strip:

-- All residents of Gaza settlements departed or have been evacuated. Construction personnel and soldiers remain in the settlements to demolish homes and prepare for the turnover of assets to the PA. Israeli press reports, citing IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, said that demolition of settlement structures continues, concentrating on the Gush Katif area August 24, and will be completed by September 3.

-- According to the IDF disengagement update (August 23 at 2345 local time), preparations are presently being made for the relocation of the cemetery in Neveh Dekalim next week (including 48 graves), the first in a number of very sensitive actions that are a part of the disengagement plan.

West Bank:

-- Sa Nur and Homesh: The IDF completed evacuation of all residents and protesters in Sa Nur and Homesh settlements August 23 by 1800, with Israeli press quoting IDF and police sources as saying that there was less resistance in these settlements than expected. According to Israeli media, a total of 40 police and protesters were lightly injured during the operation in addition to two IDF soldiers, one stabbed with a screwdriver by a teenage, female settler, and one hit in the eye with a stone. The Defense Ministry told Israeli press that removal of asbestos and other toxic materials began in Sa Nur and Homesh August 24, and that demolitions of structures there will commence August 25.

-- All four West Bank settlements evacuated are under heavy guard August 24, according to Israeli newspapers, to prevent settlers or protesters from returning. All settlement structures are expected to be demolished by early September, with the Israelimilitary base near Jenin to be removed not later than September 20, according to Israeli newspapers citing GOI Ministry of Defense sources.

-- Kadim and Ganim: Soldiers and construction workers are demolishing structures in Kadim and Ganim August 24, according to Israeli newspapers, and expect to be finished by August 25.

3. (SBU) SECURITY SITUATION:

West Bank:

-- Northern West Bank: 700 Palestinian Security Forces (PSF) from various branches are deployed east of Jenin August 24 to prevent looting of evacuated settlements or interference with Israeli forces overseeing demolition of structures in Kadim and Ganim. These forces are not permitted by the IDF to operate outside Jenin's city limits.

-- Northern West Bank Checkpoints: Jalamah checkpoint is

closed to all movement except for the IDF, using the road past the checkpoint for evacuation of Kadim and Ganim. Salem checkpoint north of Jenin is open to all traffic except trucks from 0800 to 1800, with prior coordination. Palestinian security sources reported that the IDF closed the road linking Qalqiliya and Nablus August 23 prior to evacuation of Sa Nur and Homesh settlements, and that it remains closed to Palestinian travel August 24. Passage to Tulkarm from the West Bank remains open.

-- The IDF took over three private Palestinian homes in Hebron August 23 for use as military observation points, according to Palestinian sources.

-- Incursions: The IDF entered Qalqiliya August 23 and arrested a Fatah activist there, according to PA security sources.

-- Closures: IDF closures of all roads leading to the Burqa village, south of Homesh settlement, and Bizzariya village, east of Homesh, are still in place for Palestinian traffic August 24, according to Palestinian sources.

Gaza Strip:

-- The situation in Gaza is generally calm and quiet. All settlements there have been evacuated.

-- The IDF reported one mortar fired at southern Gaza settlements August 23, but no injuries or damage resulted.

14. (SBU) PALESTINIAN REACTIONS:

-- According to Palestinian media sources, PA President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) (with PA Deputy PM Nabil Sha'ath, PLO Negotiations Chief Sa'eb Erekat and presidential advisor Nabil Abu Rudaynah) met with Egyptian PM Ahmad Nathif August 23 and President Hosni Mubarak August 24 in Cairo to discuss the Egyptian-Israeli border guards agreement and Gaza/Egypt border arrangements, and with Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa about Palestinian post-disengagement political priorities.

-- PA PM Ahmad Quraya' and Minister of State (with responsibility for Jerusalem) Hind Khury expressed concern to Palestinian television and print journalists August 24 about announced Israeli plans to build the separation barrier around the Adumim settlement block, enclosing East Jerusalem, Ma'ale Adumim (and the planned E-1 expansion), and other Adumim settlements, extending up to 16 kilometers east of Jerusalem, but leaving out several Palestinian towns, such as Abu Dis and al-Azariyah (Bethany). Khury said that the next PA Cabinet meeting will be held in Abu Dis to bring attention to the Jerusalem-area barrier, and that she will be organizing tours for the diplomatic corps around lands being expropriated to build the barrier. (Septel).

-- Hamas held large rallies in Gaza City and Khan Yunis August 23 to celebrate Israel's disengagement from Gaza.

-- A group of prominent Gazan businessmen told Ambassador Kurtzer at an August 24 roundtable that their primary concern post-disengagement is freedom of movement. They said that they also seek to maintain the existing customs envelope "as is." Post-disengagement, they do not object to the Israeli proposal for goods passage at Kerem Shalom, but insisted that passengers be permitted to cross at Rafah. Ambassador Kurtzer urged the businessmen to seek ways to address Israeli security concerns. Businessmen applauded the recent USG decision to move ahead with the water carrier project for Gaza, and emphasized the need for donor countries to begin projects now, and not to wait until the day after disengagement.

15. (SBU) GOI POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

-- The Israeli High Court of Justice ruled August 23 that as much as possible should be done to maintain the memory of the synagogues in the Gaza Strip, but those that could not be moved would be destroyed after their sanctity was withdrawn according to halachic procedures.

-- In an August 24 interview on IDF radio, MK Netanyahu criticized PM Sharon for going farther (on Gaza disengagement) than ex-Labor party chairman Amram Mitzna. Netanyahu accused MOD Shaul Mofaz of firing former IDF chief of staff Ya'alon "because he told the truth" (i.e., that disengagement could lend a "tailwind to terrorism").

16. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS/HUMANITARIAN ACCESS:

-- Gaza Coastal Road: The coastal road is now open with free movement of traffic in both directions, according to Palestinian sources.

-- Erez Crossing and Industrial Zone: According to Gaza private sector contacts, Erez remains officially closed to Palestinians, but the IDF continues to allow a small number of people to pass based on humanitarian/medical grounds with prior coordination. Some factory workers were also permitted into the Erez industrial zone, according to Palestinian sources.

-- Rafah Terminal: According to UNRWA, Rafah remains open August 24 for passenger movement in and out of Gaza, although coordination is still required for Palestinian males aged 16 to 35 years.

-- Abu Khuli Junction: Opened at 2255 hours August 23 and closed at 0530 hours August 24.

-- Karni Terminal: Karni remains open on August 24. It had been closed temporarily on August 22 as settlers were evacuated from Netzarim.

-- Kissufim: The main crossing used to enter Gush Katif and Kfar Darom settlements, Kissufim is closed except for traffic/persons leaving Gaza.
WALLES